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SummitTIMES

Vol 04 | Issue 104 | Gangtok | Thursday | 18 April 2019

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RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

Pages 8 | ₹ 5

BJP Sikkim demands inquiry into CSDS survey

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK 17 APR:

Bharatiya Janata Party Sikkim Pradesh president, DB Chauhan, has demanded that the Election Commission and concerned Returning Officer conduct a thorough investigation into the post poll survey conducted by Centre for the Study of Developing Societies [CSDS] in the State and take stringent action.

He stated that the survey violates the model code of conduct as well as the secrecy of votes. Action should be taken as per the law of the ECI to maintain the credibility of the Election Commission, he added.

Addressing a press conference here today, Mr Chauhan alleged that the State has witnessed many post poll incidents where ECI guidelines have been violated and this shows that either the Election Commission was not fully prepared or was just careless.

He added that the poll survey conducted using dummy postal ballot papers by an organisation whose credibility is not known to the State is totally against the model code of conduct. Mr Chauhan informed that another team of India Today group has also been conducting post poll survey in West Sikkim. He urged the authority to immediately stop the survey to avoid violation of the model code of conduct.

The BJP state-unit has already taken this matter up with the ECI and all concerned authorities. He urged the people to keep their faith in democracy and assured that their votes are secure.

Mr Chauhan alleged that the ruling party has been trying to abolish opposition from the State. If the Election Commission can take action against the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh for violation of ECI guidelines then why has the Election Commission in Sikkim not been able to take any action against the State CM or serve any notice to him despite threatening the opposition in his election speeches?, he asked.

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POLITICAL BACKLASH OVER ACADEMIC EXERCISE

Saddened that students suffered: CSDS Director

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 17 APR:

Sanjay Kumar, Director, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies [CSDS], has rued the fact that students were caught in the middle of a political uproar surrounding a post-poll survey being undertaken by CSDS in Sikkim.

"I am saddened by the fact that students on survey assignment were detained and suffered because they participated in an academic exercise," he told SummitTimes over the phone today when asked to comment on how things played out after Sikkim Krantikari Morcha protested the CSDS survey and the

district administration detained two professors and some students heading the exercise.

"I wish the authorities had been more lenient. These are after all just college students and not hardened criminals," he said.

The incident was triggered when students on a CSDS survey were confronted by SKM party workers at Arithang and South Sikkim on Tuesday on suspicion that they were engaged in a political exercise aimed at compromising SKM's poll prospects.

Videos of the students being heckled and questioned by SKM party workers and later also

outside the DC's office circulated widely on social media.

Apart from the complaint that post-poll surveys were banned till 19 May, SKM has also cast aspersions on the dum-

my ballot papers issued to state government officials on election duty, thereby discounting the fear that they could somehow be switched.

Mr Kumar of CSDS also informs that the

He adds that the survey also visits respondents in their homes two days after the polls and hence cannot be accused of disrupting the poll process in any way or obstructing either.

had indeed not taken any permission, added that the notification in question can be interpreted to mean that no permission was required if the survey findings were not to be published as an exit poll finding.

"The notification bans 'conducting and publishing/ broadcasting' which means conducting a survey for the purpose of publishing. We don't do that," he said. The survey findings are used much later for academic papers and not to project trends or predict winners, he added.

He adds that the survey was a nationwide post-poll exercise and when asked whether the

organization has faced similar incidents elsewhere, he said that while such incidents have happened in the past in hands of police officials and administrators who got "anxious," the matters were resolved when CSDS credentials and the academic nature of the survey was explained.

At present, the other state where the survey is underway is Mizoram, where too the election got over in the first phase.

Mr Kumar stressed that CSDS was a reputed 56-year-old organization with a focus on survey-based research studies specializing in elections.

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"This will discourage students from field survey and research"

"CSDS Post-Poll survey is a nationwide exercise"

my ballot papers the students had with them. The DC-East has since clarified that the ballot paper being used for the survey was markedly different

survey recognizes the need for maintaining voter anonymity which was why dummy ballot papers were provided as separate from the survey forms.

Meanwhile, addressing the allegation that no permission was secured to conduct the survey, Mr Kumar, while admitting that the organization

Media sensitization workshop on HPV vaccination

2nd round of HPV vaccination scheduled from 23 Apr to 04 May

GANGTOK, 17 APR (IPR):

The Department of Health Care, Human Services & Family Welfare, Government of Sikkim with support from key developmental partners UNICEF and WHO organized a Media Sensitization Workshop with journalists on the 2nd round for HPV vaccination campaign at Hotel Lemon Tree, Gangtok today.

Director General (Health Care, Human Services & Family Welfare Department), Dr Pempa T Bhutia, Govt of Sikkim chaired the meeting along with Principal Director, Dr Uttam Pradhan, Director Health Services, Dr K Jigme Topgay, Additional Director - RCH cum State Immunization Officer, Dr Phumzay Denzongpa, and Joint Director RCH, Dr Anita Bhutia, senior gynecologist and pediatrician from New STNM Multispecialty Hospital were also present.

Opening the workshop, Dr Pempa T Bhutia [DGHS, Govt. of Sikkim]



said, "Immunization is one of the most cost-effective ways to protect children's lives and futures. Through full immunization coverage, we can make sure that the benefits of life-saving vaccines reach every child. He thanked the media personnel for their positive support during the 1st round and also requested them to extend their valuable support for disseminating the correct information among the masses regarding HPV vaccine in upcoming 2nd round

and also thereafter. The vaccine will be provided free of cost to all eligible beneficiaries across the states (In all schools & Govt. Health facilities).

Dr Phumzay, Denzongpa provided details of the 2nd round of HPV vaccination campaign which is scheduled from 23 Apr to 04 May, 2019 in the state targeting around 30000 female children of age group of 9-14 years across all 4 districts. It was informed that this is the largest ever vaccination campaign in Sikkim and after

the 2nd round of HPV campaign, it will become a part of the routine immunization and will be given to all female children who have completed 9 years of age.

Addressing the gathering, Health Officer (NE states), Dr Maulik Shah, UNICEF highlighted, "Media has been our long-standing partners in the fight against polio. We now seek your support to ensure that children, no matter where they live, are immunized. Vaccination not only

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'No joy of flying', as Jet Airways grounds operations temporarily from tonight

MUMBAI, APR 17 (PTI):

Teetering for over four months due to cash-drought, Jet Airways, flying for over 25 years, Wednesday said its last flight will takeoff later this night, after its lenders refused to offer a Rs 400-crore lifeline.

"With immediate effect, we are compelled to cancel all our international and domestic flights. The last flight will operate today," Jet Airways informed the exchanges.

The airline said the decision follows the lenders refusing to offer a lifeline.

"Since no emergency funding from the lenders or any other source is forthcoming, the airline will not be able to pay for fuel or other critical services to keep the operations going... and has decided to go ahead with temporary suspension of operations," the airline said.

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5 million jobs lost between 2016-18, says report

BENGALURU, APR 17 (PTI):

Employment opportunities declined and five million men lost their jobs between 2016 and 2018, according to a report released by the city-based Azim Premji University.

The decline in job opportunities coincided with demonetisation in November 2016, although no direct causal relationship can be established based only on these trends, the State of Working India-2019 (SWI) report said.

"Accounting for the increase in working-age population, the decline in the workforce participation rate (WPR) amounts to a net loss of 5 million jobs during this

period (2016-2018).

"Recall that this analysis applies to men only. When we take women into account, the number of jobs lost will be higher," the report released on Tuesday read.

Underlining that the last three years were "one of great turmoils" in the Indian labour market as well as in the system of labour statistics, the report pointed out that unemployment rose steadily post 2011.

It found that the higher educated and the young were vastly over represented among the unemployed.

It used data from the Consumer Pyramids Survey of the Centre for Monitoring the Indian

Economy (CMIE-CPDX) to understand the employment situation between 2016 and 2018.

In addition to open unemployment among the educated, the less educated (and likely informal) have seen job losses and reduced work opportunities over this period.

The report also found that women were worse off than men with respect to levels of unemployment as well as reduced labour force participation.

As a remedial measure, the report recommended the need for Urban Employment Guarantee Programme (UEGP) on the lines of rural employment guarantee scheme that can create employment opportunities

for up to 50 million workers in small towns. Besides UEGP, the SWI report has suggested three more recommendations.

It emphasised on increasing the spending on education up to six per cent and on health up to three per cent of the gross domestic product to create over two million good jobs while supplying high quality public services.

Underlining that employment generation and public service provisions should not be compromised for meeting arbitrary fiscal deficit targets, the report called for greater public spending in view of India's fiscal situation.

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Three LS seats in WB to go polls in the second phase

KOLKATA, APR 17 (PTI): Three Lok Sabha constituencies in north Bengal - Jalpaiguri (SC), Darjeeling and Raiganj will go to the polls in the second phase of elections on Thursday. The ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the BJP are the main contenders in the three seats which will see a four-cornered contest between the two parties, the Congress and the Left Front.

The constituencies saw high profile campaigning by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, state Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, BJP president Amit Shah and Congress president Rahul Gandhi who raised a plethora of issues ranging from corruption to communalism, NRC to chitfund scams and development to security. TMC has fielded Bijoy Chandra Barman against BJP's Jayanta Kumar Roy in Jalpaiguri constituency, where Moni Kumar Darnal of Congress and Bhagirath Chandra Roy of CPI(M) are also in the fray.

In Darjeeling the TMC nominated Amar Singh Rai who will fight against Raju Bisht of BJP, Sankar Malakar of Congress and Saman Pathak of CPI(M). TMC has nominated

Kanhaiyalal Agarwal in Raiganj seat against Md Salim of CPI(M), Deepa Dasmunshi of Congress and Debashree Chowdhury of BJP. The Jalpaiguri seat is a reserved one as it has a large population of backward communities who work mainly in the tea gardens. There is also a sizeable chunk of Nepalis and people of the Rajbangshi community. The poor condition of tea garden workers, specially the closure of several tea gardens will play a major role in the constituency this election as also the politics relating to setting up of Jalpaiguri Circuit Bench of Calcutta High Court.

The picturesque Darjeeling Hills is geared for a pitched battle between two Gorkha leaders - Rai and Bisht with development and restoration of democracy as their top poll planks. The long-standing demand for a separate Gorkhaland has been relegated to the background. Rai is the Trinamool Congress candidate and has the support on the Binay Tamang faction of the GJM. Bisht is on the other hand being supported by the Bimal Gurung faction of the GJM and GNLF who are stressing on minimum wages for tea workers, potable water, electricity, education and employment.

CSDS survey...

"As the polling process is not over and postal ballot voting is still on, such surveys are an attempt to influence postal ballot voting," he alleged.

The SKM spokesperson alleged that this survey is sponsored by Sikkim Democratic Front and the CSDS state coordinator is a close relative of the Principal Secretary of the CMO.

He also informed that another survey team from the India Today group has been doing post poll surveys in West Sikkim. On the same, he demanded that the Election Commission and District Collector West take strong action on the matter.

Mr Khaling alleged that ADC [Election], Kishor Pradhan has been misusing his power to influence employees to vote for the ruling party through postal ballot. He further alleged that the ADC has been causing obstructions in the provision of postal ballot to SKM supporters.

On the same, he also demanded that the Election Commission cancel all ballot papers submitted by government employees so far and fresh ballot papers be issued with new design and colour. Arrangements should also be made for all ballot papers to be cast on a single day, he added.

If the Commission does not take any action then it also raises questions about the Election Commission, he added.

Mr Khaling went on to allege that a few government employees and police officers have been misusing their power and favouring the ruling party. SKM has given more than 25 such reports and complaints to the Election Commission, Returning Officers and the Chief Secretary but no action has been taken yet, he added.

2nd round...

saves children's lives and ensures healthy and productive future, but is also one of the most cost-effective public health intervention."

Dr Phumzay Denzongpa discussed about the HPV vaccine and cervical cancer. She also mentioned that this is the only vaccine preventable cancer. She also shared plan of action for the 2nd round of HPV campaign and experience from the 1st round of the HPV campaign.

On this occasion, SMO, Dr Subhendu Roy, WHO-NP-SP said, "World Health Organization congratulates state of Sikkim for introducing HPV vaccination campaign against cervical cancer which is one of the most common cancer in women. The Government of Sikkim in association with UNICEF, WHO and Jhpiego has been engaging with civil society organizations, partners and academia as well as media as a critical stakeholder in efforts to create trust in vaccines and address myths around immunization to ensure every child in the country gets a fair start".

'No joy of flying'...

Accordingly, the last flight will leave the Amritsar airport at 2230 hrs for New Delhi as per its flight schedule.

After a board meeting Tuesday, the management had authorised chief executive Vinay Dube to make one last appeal to the lenders for an emergency Rs 400 crore funding, and if not the demand is not met, take a final call on the future of the airline Wednesday.

Late last night, Jet Airways was informed by State Bank of India, on behalf of the consortium of lenders, that they were unable to consider its request for critical interim funding, the airline said in the statement.

Fire safety awareness program at Namchi



SUMMIT REPORT

NAMCHI, 17 APR:

During the observation of Fire Safety Week from 14-20 April the Fire Department conducted an awareness programme and inspection of different establish-

ments in Namchi.

Namchi Fire & Emergency Service Station conducted fire safety awareness program at Rong Bul GPU Centre. The program was attended by panchayats, JFMC members, in-charge, locals,

teachers and students of Rong Secondary School.

The welcome address was given by In-charge, Noel Rai, Rong Secondary School. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer, IK Rai spoke about the back ground of Fire Service Week which

is being observed from 14-21 April and on the roles & responsibilities of Fire & Emergency Service.

He also spoke about the causes of forest fire and roles and responsibilities of first responders. The SFO, Bishal Rai and LFM, KB Gurung

delivered lecture on various aspects of fire safety.

The students were taught different rescue techniques and firefighting methods. The program ended with vote of thanks by Panchayat Presidents, Raju Gurung.

Parts of north, north-east India may witness thunderstorms and rains

NEW DELHI, APR 14 (PTI): Several parts of north and northeast India are likely to witness thunderstorm and rainfall over the next 24 hours, the Met department said on Wednesday.

A western disturbance, which had caused severe weather conditions over major parts of north and central India on Tuesday, has further moved eastwards,

the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said, adding that the mercury which dipped over the last two days will again start rising. Over 50 people died due to thunderstorms, rains and lightning in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra on Tuesday.

The reduction in moisture incursion from the Arabian Sea is likely to weaken the intensity of the system from Wednesday. However,

fairly widespread to widespread rainfall with isolated thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds (speed reaching 40-50 kilometres per hour) are likely over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh and Delhi, northeast Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand during next 24 hours, the Met Department said

Isolated thunder, squalls and hailstorms are likely over east Madhya Pradesh and north Chhattisgarh during next 24 hours, it said.

Thunder, squalls are also likely over Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura during the same period.

Day maximum temperatures are likely to rise significantly over the plains of northwest India from tomorrow, the IMD added.

Saddened that...

In a statement issued earlier today, CSDS has underlined that the post-poll survey which has received political backlash in Sikkim was part of its National Election Study 2019, something that organization has been conducting since 1996.

The statement stresses that CSDS has no political affiliations and the findings will not be published in any form until the election process is completed all over the country.

"This being an academic exercise, we hope that political parties will not have any objection to it and local authorities in Sikkim will take this into account and release our colleagues and students at the earliest," the statement reads.

The detained professors have since been released and the students had been called in for questioning yesterday and the survey has since been suspended. But that might not yet be the end of the story. The still nascent academic exercise could have suffered a debilitating setback. Already, teachers with students on field on academic research and survey have begun calling them back, not willing to risk them ending up in the wrong end of some new confusion.

When asked to comment in the present incident, Mr Kumar said as much: "The over-reaction and the way students were treated will discourage Sikkim students from field surveys in the future. You need field research and surveys to advance study and learning in the social sciences."

5 million jobs...

It also highlighted the need for a concerted new industrial policy to revive Indian manufacturing.

Releasing the report Amit Basole, associate professor at Azim Premji University and lead author of the report, said, "We are positive that our four policy proposals will spur job creation and improve the basic services in our country providing equitable job opportunities for all.

"The report is our ongoing effort to present well-researched data in the areas of job creation, employment, and sustainable livelihoods."

The report analysed employment trends since 2016, which were not part of SWI 2018, the first report published in September 2018.

63 critical and 22 hyper-critical polling stations in Kalimpong



SUMMIT REPORT

KALIMPONG, 17 APR:

Kalimpong district has 63 critical polling stations, 22 hyper-critical stations, and 102 normal stations. Micro observers have been deployed in 40 polling stations, and to keep

close watch of the voting regulations, CCTV cameras have been installed in 207 booths, whereas video cameras have been installed in 20 polling stations and webcasting in 34 polling stations. 20 booths will be operated by

women personnel.

It is learnt that any voter can lodge a complaint or give information about harassment or fear at the toll-free number '1950' to which the officers will respond immediately

All PM does is tell lies: Rahul Gandhi

WAYANAD/ALATHUR,

APR 17 (PTI):

Launching a blistering attack on Narendra Modi, Congress Chief Rahul Gandhi said all that the Prime Minister "does is tell lies and steal from the poor people." Gandhi, who addressed three election rallies in his Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency, spread over the districts of Wayanad, Malappuram and Kozhikode and campaigned in Thiruthala in Palakkad district, attacked Modi and RSS and touched on corruption.

Shah was referring to the IUMLs green flags during Rahul Gandhi's road show in Wayanad on April 4 after filing his papers.

Gandhi also said the saffron party was arrogant and believed that they can re-define Indian history.

"Only the Indian people can define, decide about the country. It does not matter that Uttar Pradesh is much bigger than Nagaland. The voice of all Indians matter.

This is the fight that is taking place. Why do these people want to define India? The entire goal to re-define India is to steal from India.

The entire idea is to create two Indias. One India for the Ambanis, Adanis, Nirav Modis, Mehul Chokias, Vijay Malys and one for others", Gandhi said lashing out at the Prime minister.

He also said poor farmers who took meagre loans of around Rs

20,000 were behind bars for non-repayment while the rich who availed loans over Rs 35,000 crore were walking free.

Continuing his tirade against Modi and the RSS, Gandhi said issues of Kerala should be decided by the people and not by Modi or the RSS chief. In the three rallies in Wayanad, Gandhi tore into the BJP-led NDA government and said the saffron party was only interested in imposing its ideology on people of the country.

"Who is Mohan Bhagwat to teach us about culture and history?. Kerala should be run by the people of Kerala. This is the same sentiment in state after state," he said, addressing a rally at Wandoor in Wayanad constituency.

Taking a jibe at Modi, Gandhi said he was not here to tell his 'Mann Ki Baat', but understand the various difficulties, including the night travel ban, man-animal conflicts and lack of medical facilities being faced by the people here.

"I understand there are complex problems here. There are man-animal conflicts. There is a conflict between development and environment. I want to see a solution. I don't believe in imposing a solution.

Brand Monginis set to return to city on Good Friday

KOLKATA, APR 17 (PTI): Popular bakery brand Monginis, which just vanished one fine morning of 2015 from Kolkata and its suburbs to be replaced by a new brand, is set to make a comeback on this Good Friday.

A dispute between the local franchisee and the brand owners had led to the development in that year and all Monginis shops turned Mio Amore.

Now, city-based Ganuram chain of confectionery have taken West Bengal's master franchise for manufacturing and retailing Monginis bakery products in the state, Kolkata Partner Anand Chaurasia told PTI. He said, nine Monginis stores will be opened on April 19 and by May end, a total 60 brand shops will be in place in Kolkata and suburbs.

The century-old brand Monginis is owned by Mumbai based Khorakiwalas and was introduced to Kolkata in 1992 by a local partner. But, owing to disputes, all of the 155 odd Monginis shops were rebranded as Mio Amore in 2015.

It was then decided that Monginis cannot be launched in Kolkata at least for three years.

A top Monginis official said now there was no hurdle for the brand to be relaunched and a strong partner had been roped in for the comeback.

The Chaurasias' is believed to have pumped in around Rs 20 crore for the brand excluding real-estate investment.

Monginis boasts to have 650 stores and 16 manufacturing facilities across the country.

I believe in the wisdom and intellectual of our people in resolving such issues," Gandhi said.

"I am not like the Prime Minister. I am not going to make false promises and tell you I will give you two crore jobs or Rs 15 lakh in bank accounts or that I will give farmers whatever they want. I am not going to lie to you. Because I respect your intelligence, your wisdom, Gandhi said.

The crowd also chanted 'Rahul, Rahul' when he said he wanted to have a lifelong relationship with the people of the hilly Wayanad constituency.

"I just don't want to have a relationship for just a few months. I want a lifelong relationship with you.

I want the sisters of Wayanad to say that I am like their brother, fathers and mothers to say that I am their son," Gandhi said. The voice of the south was as "important" as rest of the country, he said, adding Kerala was an example of peaceful co-existence.

There is a lot that the rest of the country can learn from Kerala and Wayanad, he said.

Gandhi began his campaign in Wayanad by offering 'bali tharpanam' (paying oblation to departed souls) to his ancestors at Thirunelli temple.

Congress accuses Modi govt of 'hounding' opposition with 'motivated' I-T raids ahead of polls

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, APR 17 (PTI): The Congress on Wednesday accused the Modi government of targeting opposition leaders by using agencies like the Income Tax department and Enforcement Directorate, and said the people of India will give a befitting reply to the BJP in these elections.

A day after income tax sleuths along with poll flying squad carried out raids at the residence of DMK leader Kanimozhi at Tuticorin, senior Congress leader P Chidambaram, in a series of tweets, said "the news" is that nothing was found during searches in her residence. The former finance minister alleged that the Income Tax department was taking "autocratic and partial" action in Tamil Nadu in the run up to Lok Sabha elections.

"How is it that tip off on opposition leaders alone is received (by officials)," he wondered in his tweet in Tamil.

He also said, "The marker of the 2019 Parliamentary elections in Tamil Nadu is the Income Tax departments autocratic and partial steps." Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala alleged that motivated I-T raids is the only tool left with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and said the people can see through this.

"Hounding Opposition leaders through motivated IT raids is the only tool left with Modiji. BJP has four allies- PM Modi, Sh Shah, ED and IT to fight these elections. People of India are seeing through this, they will give a befitting reply to BJP on May 23," Surjewala said on Twitter.

Candidates brave sweltering heat with summer-friendly clothes, balanced diet

RUMELA SINHA KOLKATA, APR 17 (PTI): With the election fever having reached its peak, candidates are literally sweating it out in the Sun, as they make their last-ditch effort to woo the electorate.

Even as the opposing parties cross words on the battleground, one issue that has served as a unifying factor for the candidates is the travails of canvassing under the scorching Sun.

Nothing, however, can bog them down at this last-minute as they continue to brave the heat with summer-friendly clothes and a balanced diet.

Union minister and BJP candidate Babul Supriyo, who hits the campaign trail around 9 in the morning, usually carries home-cooked food with him.

During lunch break, he visits a party's karyakartas home, shares food with his supporters.

"I thrive on a sugar-free and gluten-free diet to keep going. There

are times, however, when people offer me a sweet or a sherbet which I cannot refuse. Apart from that, music keeps me upbeat under the blazing Sun. I keep humming songs, it helps me maintain my cool," the singer-turned-politician said.

Quite like Supriyo, BJP's Krishnanagar candidate Kalyan Chowbey loads his vehicle with fruits, coconut water and curd.

"My day starts at 7.30 am. I first visit the local market, talk to people before taking to the streets with my team. My day ends sometime around midnight, or even extends beyond that. Only the other day, I participated in a nightlong cricket tournament. The love and the adulation you receive from people are your stress-busters in this heat."

Chowbey is particular about his choice of clothes for padyatra and roadshows.

"During the day, I stick to linen clothes and drink lots of coconut water to stay hydrated. As I

am a vegetarian, my diet usually consists of chappati, dal and sabzi (veg-gies)," he added.

According to preventive medicine specialist Dr Debasish Basu, it is important to have fluids and oil-free food to avoid dehydration under the Sun. "Political candidates or any person for that matter should avoid caffeine and fizzy drinks when out in the Sun for long hours. The sugar in the cold drink gives an immediate kick, but the phosphoric acid in it dehydrates the body. It is important to drink room-temperature water and stick to fruit juices and less-oily food to get going," he said.

Basu also insisted that candidates should wear cotton and linen clothes to stay comfortable.

"Cool and breezy clothes help us stay comfortable under the scorching Sun. I would suggest cotton, linen and other breathable fabrics, which allows better air flow, to beat the summer heat," he added. For Sau-

gata Roy, TMCs Dum Dum constituency candidate, a wet towel and insulin injections are a part of his every day campaign kit.

"I usually place a wet towel on my head and drink electrolyte water when campaigning in the Sun. I have to eat outside on most days, which is not a very healthy thing to do.

At times, I even forget to take my insulin injections," he sighed.

Basu warned candidates with diabetes against drinking too much water.

"Candidates often get stressed, when addressing a rally or participating in a debate. It can have a direct impact on sugar levels. It is best to avoid drinking too much water, while sipping in watermelon juices once in a while," he added.

Trinamool Congress MLA Mahua Maitra, who is Mamata Banerjees pick for the Krishnanagar Lok Sabha seat, makes it a point to apply sunscreen lotion and wear sunglasses when she leaves home for campaigning.

The ruling party nominee also eats less when out in the heat, but drinks water every now and then to stay hydrated. "I usually eat vegetable-based dishes and fruits for lunch. Also, I wear full-sleeve muslin shirts and cotton saris to avoid heat exposure. A strong sunscreen lotion and sunglasses are a must during the peak hours," she maintained.

Unlike Chowbey or Moitra, CPI(M)s Raiganj candidate Mohammed Salim claimed that he does not adopt any particular measure to beat the heat during canvassing as meeting people and party workers in the day is "part of his everyday routine".

"I usually eat less oily food, all round the year.

When I am out campaigning, I halt a locals house for lunch.

There are tube wells installed across the constituency. When I am thirsty, I drink water from a tube well," the 61-year-old veteran leader and sitting MP from Raiganj added.

Five social science chapters dropped from CBSE class 10 syllabus

NEW DELHI, APR 17 (PTI): The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has decided to drop five social science chapters from class 10 syllabus from this academic session, according to the new curriculum.

The dropped chapters, including three on political studies and two on environment, will only be part of internal assessment, but not the final board exam.

The chapters are -- Challenges to Democracy, Democracy and Diversity, Political Struggles and Movements, Forest and Wildlife and Water Resources. "The chapter will be assessed in the periodic tests, but will not be evaluated in the board examination," the brief attached with the syllabus sent to schools

read. The board had last month issued a circular to schools, saying it wanted to align its assessment patterns with future needs as the Ministry of Human Resource Development has decided to participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2021.

"Countrywide consultations were held with CBSE stakeholders, including teachers, students, heads of institutions and experts in the field to suggest ways to strengthen the assessment and evaluation practices of the board," the circular read.

"It was agreed upon that the school-based or internal assessment needs to be strengthened by incorporating more diverse strategies," it added.

KUTSHE SHEGU

The 49 day Shegu of Lt. Meena Kumari Rai w/o Phur Shangey Sherpa who left for heavenly abode on 6 Mar, 2019 falls on 22 Apr, 2019.



All relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers for the departed soul at our residence at Upper Phalidara. We also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude towards all those who extended their support during the time of bereavement.

Contact: 90833-85240, 89673-16501.

ANTHYESTHI KRIYA

Anthyesthi kriya of our beloved mother, Lt. Has-ta Kumari Subba who left for her heavenly abode on 12 Apr, 2019 falls on 20 Apr, 2019.



All relatives, friends, and well wishers are requested to join us for offering prayers to the departed soul at our residence at Soreng busty.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who stood by us during our time of bereavement.

Jit Bahadur Subba (Husband). Deepen Subba, Sachin Subba, Preeten Subba (Sons): 70298 85112, 74309 25608.

KUTSHE SHEGU

The 49th Day Kutshe Shegu of Late Norden Tshering Lepcha of Naga Namgor, North Sikkim who left for his heavenly abode on 04/03/2019 falls on 21/04/2019. All friends, relatives and well-wishers are requested to join us in offering prayer of departed soul at our residents at Naga Nomgor, North Sikkim.



We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all those who stood by us in our time of bereavement and regret our inability to thank them individually.

Lachhi Tamang (wife) and family members. 7384321454/9775819998/8945969929

Notre Dame fire should be 'wake-up' call for India to protect its heritage buildings: Global expert

KUNAL DUTT

NEW DELHI, APR 17 (PTI): The devastating blaze at the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris should serve as a "wake-up call" for India, a global heritage expert said Wednesday and suggested that the new government should conduct a "national-level fire audit" of museums and other cultural landmarks within 12 months in office.

Vinod Daniel, an India-born Australian and top museum specialist, also said that along with the central-level exercise, a state-level fire safety auditing should also be done as a large portion of India's cultural and architectural wealth are locally governed.

The iconic cathedral, part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the most celebrated monuments globally.

On Monday, days ahead of the World Heritage Day (April 18), an inferno ripped through the over 850-year-old iconic Paris landmark destroying a large part of its roof and causing its central spire to collapse, leaving the world stunned.

Daniel, 57, who is a board member of the Paris-based International Council of Museums (ICOM), says while Indians have reacted very emotionally to the incident, which is important, but as a nation, India should take valuable lessons out of this loss and "assess its own fire safety and risk management capabilities".

"It should have been taken note of immediately but since elections are underway, we will have to wait for the

new government. But, the next government, should conduct a national-level fire safety audit of museums and other cultural and architectural landmarks within the first 12 months of its office," Daniel told PTI in an interview.

The global museum expert said besides the UNESCO heritage sites, many old and iconic temples and other places of worship spread across the country are listed under state archaeology departments and therefore, state-level audits should be done in consonance with the national exercise.

Daniel had last December cautioned that a majority of museums and cultural repositories in India were at risk of suffering "grave damage" in the event of a major fire, and suggested that a disaster management plan be properly implemented by these institutions.

The massive fire, the footage of which people watched around the world, has ignited a discourse on preservation of iconic heritage sites from fire and other risks.

Notre-Dame de Paris, meaning 'Our Lady of Paris', is a medieval Catholic cathedral consecrated to the Virgin Mary and considered to be one of the finest examples of French Gothic architecture made popular in books, magazines and films.

The famed gargoyles of the cathedral watching over the streets of Paris are some of the most enduring images of this landmark celebrated in Victor Hugo's immortal classic "The Hunchback of Notre Dame", which was adapt-

ed into a film in 1939.

Daniel praised the French response to the colossal fire and said the firefighters trained in handling heritage objects and environment "mitigated the damage".

President Emmanuel Macron has vowed to rebuild Notre-Dame within five years. France's cathedrals have prepared to ring their bells on Wednesday to mark 48 hours since the devastating blaze began.

The ICOM board member recalled the fire last year at the National Museum in Brazil and the one which gutted the National Museum of Natural History in Delhi in 2016, saying the Notre Dame fire should now serve as a "wake-up call for India".

The Sydney-based expert said fire globally is the "number one threat" for any such building, roughly "one in 3,000 buildings" run that risk.

Also, at present, a majority of museums, old libraries and cultural repositories do not have a proper disaster management plan in place and hence, stand at risk of suffering grave damage in case of a major fire, as it happened in Brazil, Daniel said.

"And, that is why India needs to do the central-level and state-level audits, and then a budget should be allocated to ensure a timeline-based comprehensive risk management plan. And, these audits need to be done periodically," he said.

"We need to have comprehensive risk management guidelines and India needs to revisit its risk manage-

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

What's Your Hobby?

Save the young from boredom, please

That Sikkim has an addiction problem is no secret. The daily march of “drug” hauls and arrests under the Sikkim Anti-Drugs Act make that more than amply clear. For those who don’t waste their time with newspapers, a visit to any of the schools in the State, and an honest conversation with the heads of the institutions will bring home the reality of how desperate the situation with alcohol and contraband substances has become here. Agreed, there are earnest interventions underway as well like the SAATHI (Sikkim Against Addiction Towards Healthy India) programme and the clutch of people working with detoxification and rehabilitation now qualify for a medal for the service they are rendering the State. The problem, however, is neither showing any signs of abating, nor is the State anywhere close to figuring out a proper rehabilitation model under which sobriety, in the very least, is reciprocated with proper assimilation back into society.

Speak to students involved in outreach programmes and those who have counseled friends and peers away from addiction, and it becomes clear that ennui is among the leading causes of addiction. The amount of boredom we put our young through is criminal. They rarely go to exciting schools, only occasionally have inspiring classes and rarely offered challenging tasks. Yes, problems at home, peer pressure and ease of access are also factors, but these play supporting roles in the drama of substance abuse which has tedious monotony as the villain. And this boredom is not only distracting the young towards substances that make their “leisure” hours “fun”, but is also making more of them disinterested and lacking in passion. A worrying trend noticeable among the young is their increasing resistance to get excited about anything. This, in an age-group which was until recently accused of being easily excitable, is a big worry. And the only way to wean them away from the stupor of their times, is to give them engagements which get them excited, which encourage them to share and feel proud about their progress. Yes, sports delivers on this account as well, but a more inclusive exercise would be giving them hobbies because that demands only passion and interest, is accessible to all, at all times. A group of passionate hobbyists routinely organize events to celebrate their collections with a wider audience. Students turned up in large numbers, and one could sense awe in their eyes and excitement in their voices as they took in the wonder of what, let’s accept it, are old fashioned hobbies, like philately and numismatics. Now, let’s look around – what are the hobbies of the new generation?

Returning to the problem of addiction and the rehabilitation of those who have gone clean, a common refrain from all of them was that the challenge of staying clean and helping their peers stay clean say them through the most difficult earlier days and made completion of their rehab courses possible. Things fall apart for them the moment they return to the “normal” settings of their everyday lives without the armour of whatever drug or addiction it is that reinforced them earlier. Their self-confidence wobbles and they find themselves somehow inadequate. Yes, giving them skills will help them, but giving them a hobby they are passionate about and keep growing in will give them confidence, provide them the self-esteem boost they need to assimilate back into society. Ditto for schools. Give the young real hobbies, photography for instance or real training in painting or pottery and even carpentry, support them, see them use their time better, and then watch a generation stay away from drugs. Yes, it could be as simple as that...

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Journalism's Assange problem

KATHY KIELY & LAUREL LEFF
theconversation.com

These days, anybody with an internet connection can be a publisher.

That doesn't make everybody a journalist.

This distinction has become more important than ever in light of two recent events.

One was the arrest of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. The other was a proposal by lawmakers from Georgia, the Peach State, that looked more like an export from the Georgia that was part of the Soviet Union: a so-called “ethics in journalism” act that would have imposed onerous new requirements and potential civil penalties on reporters.

As soon as news broke of Assange's potential extradition to the United States for trial on charges of conspiracy, his allies began campaigning to make him a Fourth Estate martyr.

“Every journalist in the world” should be speaking out on Assange's behalf, said Intercept editor Glenn Greenwald. Another fugitive leaker of U.S. government secrets, Edward Snowden, tweeted that Assange's arrest represents “a dark day for press freedom.”

As two journalism professors who practiced the craft for many years before becoming teachers of it, we know firsthand how powerfully reporters are drawn to unpopular causes. It's an admirable reflex that often makes for great journalism and a better society.

But granting Assange journalist status is beyond problematic: It's likely to draw more attacks on press freedom such as the Georgia lawmakers' thinly disguised attempt to sanction and ostracize journalists whose work they don't like.

STANDARDS DIFFERENTIATE JOURNALISM

As the Pew Research Center has shown, journalists already are an endangered species. In part that's because the digital revolution eliminated the advertising that subsidized newsrooms.

But as the Knight Foundation has documented, those financial problems are compounded by a credibility crisis. “Most U.S. adults, including more than nine in 10 Republicans, say they personally have lost trust in the news media in recent years,” the foundation reported in September 2018.

There may be lots of reasons for this but it certainly doesn't help that more Americans are getting their news from social media feeds that intermingle journalism with the kind of propaganda that is keeping Facebook busy playing whack-a-mole with trolls, sent a deluded man with a gun to a neighborhood pizza restaurant in Washington, D.C. and stoked protests on a college campus with incendiary fake tweets.

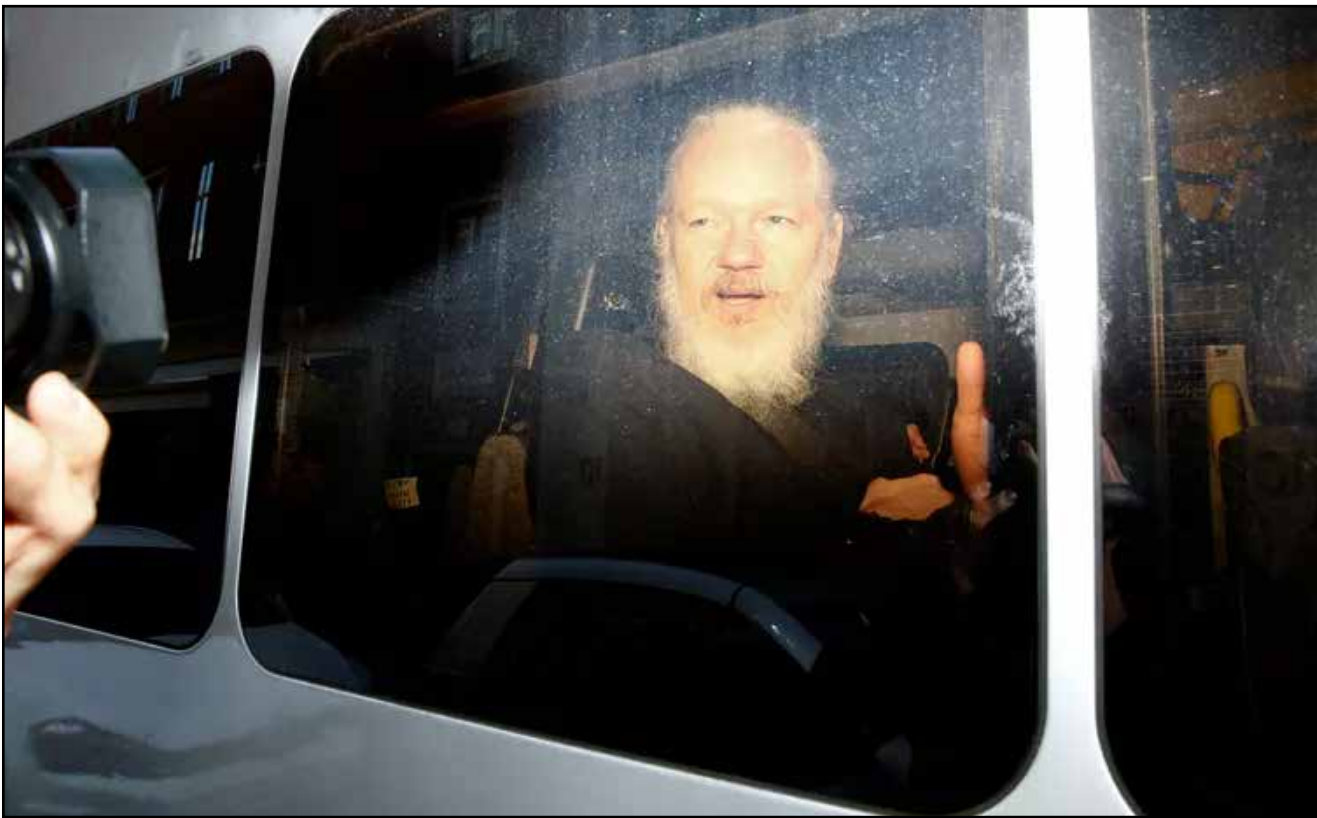
As a profession, journalists are becoming increasingly aware of the need to advocate for, and try to uphold, standards that differentiate them from those

who merely make information available.

The New York Times did exactly that in 2010, when it ran stories based on documents obtained from WikiLeaks. An editor's note explained why the Times believed publication to be in the public interest, how the paper gave government officials a chance to respond before publication, and how it redacted “information that would endanger confidential informants or compromise national security.”

The Times wrote that it shared its rationale for making the redactions with WikiLeaks “in the hope that they would similarly edit the documents,” but Assange does not appear to have been impressed. He followed no journalistic practices or journalism ethics in subsequent data dumps.

When WikiLeaks posted the emails of Democrat-



ic National Committee and Clinton campaign staffers in 2016, it included home and email addresses, and credit card, Social Security and passport numbers, as well as the details of a staffer's suicide attempt.

DESERVING A PRIVILEGE

In insisting that journalists should not be prosecuted for disclosing classified information or for refusing to reveal confidential sources to grand juries, the press is seeking a privilege in both the legal and literal meaning of the term.

It's not a privilege if everyone gets it. There has to be something special about what journalists do, and how and why they do it, that makes them worthy of a privilege that others don't receive.

So far, the charges against Assange are for conspiring to hack into a Pentagon computer network. As Gabe Rottman of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press writes, that “isn't something that a newsroom lawyer would counsel a reporter to do.”

Rottman's measured analysis also notes another concern for data reporters: The 1984 law at the heart of the Assange indictment, the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act could, if interpreted in an

overbroad fashion, endanger journalists (or other members of the public, such as academics) who use computer programming to “scrape” otherwise hard-to-analyze information from public government websites. But that's not the issue here.

Nor, significantly, is Assange charged with publishing on the WikiLeaks website documents obtained through that hack. Legal decisions have long offered a great deal of protection to those who publish information, nowhere near as much to those who seek access to government information or facilities, and virtually none to those who steal information.

The best way for press and press freedom organizations to ensure the Assange case doesn't set precedent that interferes with the public's right to access important information – even information

the government doesn't want to reveal – is through friend of the court briefs.

Editorial boards rushing to make Assange a poster boy for press freedom, as former New York Times lawyer and First Amendment icon James Goodale recently suggested they should, will only provoke lawmakers into pushing more proposals like the journalism review board. Thankfully, that died earlier this month when the Georgia legislature adjourned without acting on it.

Journalists are justifiably concerned that more such attacks are likely. Heading them off will require journalists to help their audience understand and appreciate the professional and ethical standards that distinguish real reporters from mere disseminators.

In a digital age, the latter are a dime a dozen. It's the reporters who need to be protected and defended.

[Kathy Kiely is Professor and Lee Hills Chair of Free Press Studies, University of Missouri-Columbia; Laurel Leff is Associate Professor of Journalism, Northeastern University]

Indonesia's Elections: Why do they matter and what's at stake?

YOHANES SULAIMAN
theconversation.com

The world's third largest democracy, Indonesia, is holding its fifth national election since the fall of Soeharto's authoritarian regime in 1998.

India may organise the biggest and most expensive elections in the world, but they aren't as complex as in Indonesia.

Located between the Indian and Pacific oceans, Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world in terms of population and is the world's biggest Muslim populated country. And its future is at stake with these elections.

The elections' results will determine the stability of Indonesia as a democratic country, from both economic and security standpoints.

Here is what you need to know about Indonesia's elections and what's at stake.

FIVE POLLS AT ONCE

For the first time, Indonesia will hold presidential and legislative elections at the same time. The government claims the simultaneous system will cut costs.

So, once entering a voting booth, a voter must deal with five voting ballots at once, making it the most complex election in the world.

THE NUMBER

There are nearly 192.8 million registered voters, with almost 50% of them under 40.

On Wednesday morning, eligible voters will go to 810,329 voting booths across the country to vote for a president and vice president and

almost 20,500 legislative members in the national, provincial and district level, as well as 132 senators for the Regional Representative Council. At least 300,000 candidates are running for the legislative seats.

For the presidential seat, a voter must choose between incumbent Jokowi “Jokowi” Widodo and his rival Prabowo Subianto.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

There are concerns about this election. Pundits are questioning the quality of Indonesian democracy, amidst growing repression, rising conservatism, coupled with growing Islamism and anti-feminist trends.

There are also concerns about the military's growing influence. One may be forgiven for thinking Indonesia might be on the brink of civil war.

Not surprisingly, many believe a lot is at stake in these elections. It is, in essence, a battle between flawed technocratic reformers who nevertheless represent a moderate, inclusive Indonesia, versus nationalist populists who court hard-line Islamist groups with illiberal agenda.

REMATCH BETWEEN JOKOWI AND PRABOWO

The 2019 presidential election is a rematch between Jokowi, a layman and furniture seller who became a politician, and Prabowo, a former general and ex-son-in-law of former dictator Soeharto. In the 2014 presidential election, Jokowi won the election by a small margin.

To secure a second term, Jokowi touts his economic accomplishments under his administration. One of

them is promoting rapid infrastructure development, neglected by his predecessors.

Jokowi's other strategy is allying himself with Nadlatul Ulama (NU), the country's biggest Muslim organisation by choosing Ma'ruf Amin, a senior figure in the NU, as his running mate. By taking this strategy, Jokowi is ditching his previous approach of promoting pluralism that worked for him in 2014.

By choosing Ma'ruf, Jokowi hopes to avoid being attacked by his rival using religious issues in a similar way to his former partner, Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama. Ahok was Jokowi's former deputy when the latter became Jakarta governor.

A Chinese and Christian, Ahok was a victim of a black campaign organised by conservatives to stop him from winning the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Not only did Ahok fail to win the election, but he was also later found guilty of blasphemy charges. He was recently released from prison.

On the other side is Prabowo. Prabowo is running with Sandiaga Uno, one of the richest people in Indonesia.

Prabowo's supporters are those who long for the stability under the authoritarian rule of Soeharto. Compared to Jokowi, Prabowo is seen as a stronger leader due to his experience in the military.

Prabowo's supporters also include the conservatives who join him simply because they despise Jokowi.

Apart from attacking Jokowi's economic policies, other strategies

from Prabowo's supporters are creating an image that Jokowi is hostile to Muslims' interests.

In return, Jokowi's supporters end up attacking Prabowo by saying he is not a good Muslim. They question Prabowo's piety by asking where he is doing his Friday prayer, which is an obligation for Muslim men. They also insinuate that Prabowo is supporting the establishment of an Islamic state, leading to his vigorous denial during the presidential debates.

PREDICTING THE RESULT, WHOEVER WINS

Jokowi's victory would vindicate his economic policies and signal to the oppositions – or, rather, the candidates for the 2024 presidential election – that taking a hard-line position will not appeal to the majority of voters.

Of course, this does not mean that candidates can ignore the role of Islam in politics, as Ahok painfully experienced in his failed 2017 Jakarta election. Rather, it is much better to take a more moderate stance to gain support.

If Prabowo wins, this will indicate that identity politics remains potent and taking hard-line religious position works. Granted, this does not necessarily mean Prabowo approves such tactics. Still, the fact that those who often use religious-based attacks are mostly in his camp means that his victory would, unfortunately, be seen as a victory of identity populism politics, which will be used again in the next election.

[the writer is Associate lecturer, Universitas Jendral Achmad Yani]

In India's first cashless island, cash is currency

RAJKUMAR LEISHEMBA KARANG (MANIPUR), APR 17 (PTI): As election-eering reach fever pitch elsewhere in the country, there are few signs India's first cashless island is as excited.

Isolated from the frenzied campaigning, fisherfolk of Karang, an idyllic lake island in Manipur, are trying to get on with their daily struggles to earn a livelihood.

A couple of flags of BJP, a few posters North East India Development Party and some banners of Congress are the only signs here that show a national political event is underway.

For locals, it has been a hard reality check. Imagine. And compare.

In January 2017, two months after demonetisation was announced abruptly, they enjoyed a brief moment in the Sun when Karang, located in the middle of Loktak lake, was declared the country's first cashless island.

Ahead of polling on Thursday, locals said all hopes of a better life, because of that distinction, are dashed now.

Oinam Babu, a shopkeeper, wrapped up his PoS machine six months ago and tucked it in a corner after frequent breakdowns. He had hoped to use it for accepting digital payments.

Babu is among three shopkeepers in the area who were given PoS machines. He said the machine wasn't registered in his name but given to him by a "facilitator" when the cashless drive



had started. He received cash reimbursement from the facilitator for every transaction made through the device.

"The PoS machine was meant more for tourists as locals here always make cash payments. The awareness of a cashless system is negligible here. It is of no use now," he told PTI.

With the tourist season in Karang lasting only two months June-July, he said there is little he can do with the device.

"Moreover, the machine often breaks down and it is not worth going all the way to Moirang (around 9 km) to fix it. That's why I have packed it and kept it in a corner of my shop," he added.

Karang Island Cashless Promotion Society president Ningthoujam Indrakumar said, "It is a failure. Nothing is happening now."

Indrakumar, who operates a motor-boat, blames officials for the

failure. He said they did not follow up on their promises to make the cashless drive a success.

"Initially, training and awareness programmes were organised, but nothing happened later," he lamented.

In April 2018, Deputy Commissioner of Bishnupur district, under which Karang comes, was awarded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for making the remote place the first cashless island.

"In absence of proper infrastructure to support digital payments, you cannot expect this to succeed here," Indrakumar said.

According to him, out of the total population of nearly 3,000 in the island, only a few have smartphones, a key instrument for digital payments. It is yet to have a broadband connection.

It takes nearly two hours by road from the state capital Imphal to cover the 52-km stretch

to reach the nearest dock at Thanga to enter Karang by boat. Another 10 minutes by boat leads to the main island area.

"Everyday, nearly 50-60 children from Karang take boats to the mainland to attend their school. They all pay in cash for the ferry. Even adults who have to go out of the island pay in cash," he said. A one-way trip to the island by boat on a sharing basis costs Rs 10 while booking a motor-boat for a round-trip by tourists can cost up to Rs 300.

Indrakumar, who is also a member of Karang Island Boat Association, said efforts were made to make at least the ferry payments digital as it "in a way served as the gateway to the cashless island" but it hasn't yielded results.

At the island's Primary Health Centre, an official on duty who requested anonymity, said the fee of Rs 10 for an

OPD card is accepted in cash only.

"It is because that's the only way of payment that the locals know," the official said.

Karang Island Development Organisation president Salam Kheda said the government lacked in making the island economically developed and hence the cashless drive failed.

"Unless the local economy develops, how can you think of a successful digital payments system here," he questioned. With a majority of the natives of the island earning about Rs 300-400 a day through fishing, Kheda said requests to the government for support on developing self-employment means, skilling the youth and encourage vocations like handloom and handicrafts have not been heard.

"Physical connectivity is also a major issue here. Even after laying the foundation stone for a bridge to connect Karang with Thanga years ago, nothing has happened," he said.

He said it is clear that "everything was done to announce Karang as India's first cashless island and nothing beyond".

While there is disillusionment, Babu said the intent of digital payments system was good.

"We are hoping that irrespective of who comes to power at the Centre after the general election, they follow up with a vision for development. Karang badly needs development," he asserted.

Stage set for 2nd phase of LS poll covering 11 states, 1 UT

NEW DELHI, APR 17 (PTI): Union ministers Jitendra Singh, Jial Oram, Sadananda Gowda and Pon Radhakrishnan, former prime minister H D Deve Gowda and DMK's Dayanidhi Maran, A Raja and Kanimozhi are among the 1,600-odd contestants in the second phase of Lok Sabha polls to be held in 95 seats Thursday across 11 states and the union territory of Puducherry.

Thirty eight of the 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu will go to polls besides 18 assembly constituencies. Polling in Vellore Lok Sabha seat, which is currently represented by the AIADMK, was cancelled Tuesday by the Election Commission following recovery of huge amount of cash allegedly from an associate of a DMK leader recently. The EC also announced postponement of polling in Tripura (East) Lok Sabha seat to the third phase on April 23, saying the prevailing law-and-order situation there is not conducive for holding free and fair polls.

Besides Tamil Nadu, polling will also be held in 14 seats in Karnataka, 10 in Maharashtra, eight in Uttar Pradesh, five each in Assam, Bihar and Odisha, three each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, two in Jammu and Kashmir and one seat each in Manipur and Puducherry. Elections will also be held in 35 assembly constituencies in Odisha.

Of the 95 constituencies, the AIADMK holds the maximum of 36 seats, followed by the BJP with 27 seats. The Congress had won 12 of these seats in 2014, the Shiv Sena and the BJD 4 each, the JD-S and the RJD two each and the AIUDEF, the NCP, the JD-U, the PDP, the AINRC, the PMK, the CPI-M and the TMC one seat each.

Nearly 15.8 crore voters are eligible to vote in the second phase. Other prominent candidates in fray include Congress leaders Verappa Moily and Raj Babbar, National Conference president Farooq Abdullah and BJP's Hema Malini.

In Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK, contesting as part of the NDA. The alliance comprises among

others BJP, PMK, DMDK and Tamil Maanila Congress of former union minister G K Vasan.

The DMK has formed a "Secular Progressive Alliance" comprising the Congress and Left parties, among others.

The electoral battle in the state is largely among the two fronts led by the Dravidian majors and the AMMK led by TTV Dinakaran, an AIADMK rival, though parties such as the fledgling Makkal Needhi Maiam of actor-politician Kamal Hassan are also testing their fortunes. Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu are the first ever after the demise of Dravidian stalwarts J Jayalathaa of AIADMK and M Karunanidhi of the DMK.

In Odisha, Chief Minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik is contesting from his home turf Hinjili in Ganjam district and Bijepur in Bargarh.

Among others, Union Tribal Affairs Minister Oram of the BJP, BJD's Rajya Sabha MPs Prasanna Acharya and Achyut Samant, BJP nominee and three-time MP Kharabela Swain are in the fray in the Lok Sabha polls.

Even though security was heightened, Maoists gunned down a polling officer in Kandhamal district of Odisha Wednesday when she was leading a team of poll personnel to a booth in Phulbani assembly segment.

It is a high-stakes battle for the ruling Congress-JD(S) alliance in Karnataka as any adverse result is likely to have an impact on the longevity of the coalition government in the state.

The BJP is determined to improve its tally compared to last time riding on the Modi wave.

A total of 179 candidates are in the fray in Maharashtra in the 10 constituencies spread in parts of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions. Former chief ministers Ashok Chavan and Sushilkumar Shinde of Congress are contesting from Nanded and Solapur seats respectively.

Cinestars Hema Malini and Raj Babbar are among the 85 candidates from Uttar Pradesh, whose electoral fate will be decided on Thursday.

The eight Lok Sabha seats, where polling is scheduled to be held, were won by the BJP in 2014.

In Jammu and Kashmir, authorities have deployed over 80 companies for election duty in the twin constituencies of Srinagar and Udhampur. Thursday's polling in Srinagar will be keenly watched within and outside Kashmir as the constituency recorded an all-time low of 7.2 per cent voter turn out in the 2017 bye-election, marred by violence on polling day that left nine people dead and scores of others injured.

Fate of 68 candidates will be decided in Bihar by 86.01 lakh voters across Bhagalpur, Banka, Kishanganj, Katihar and Purnea Lok Sabha constituencies.

Five seats in Assam will see polling Thursday and one seat in Manipur.

The past few days have seen hectic campaigning by top leaders including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief Amit Shah, Congress president Rahul Gandhi and a host of Union ministers.

There was lot of drama during electioneering as several leaders like Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union minister Maneka Gandhi, BSP chief Mayawati and SP leader Azam Khan made controversial remarks, prompting the Election Commission to bar them from campaigning for varying periods over violations of the moral code of conduct.

In West Bengal, the EC has deployed 194 companies of central forces in the three constituencies going to polls to cover 80 per cent of the 5,390 booths for free and fair polling.

The fight for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Puducherry is expected to be mainly between the ruling Congress, which has put up former Speaker V Vaithilingam and the opposition AINRC's K Narayanasamy.

The Lok Sabha polls are being held in seven-phases for 543 seats on April 11, April 18, April 23, April 29, May 6, May 12 and May 19, and counting will be on May 23.

Cong files FIR against Nagaland Dy CM for MCC violation

KOHIMA, APR 17 (PTI): The Congress has filed an FIR against Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton for allegedly violating the model code of conduct during the April 11 Lok Sabha poll in the state.

The party has demanded repolling at Rhiphim Polling Station in Patton's home constituency -- 37-Tyui in Wokha district.

"The FIR against Patton is for serious violation of model code of conduct by entering the polling station wearing a political party's scarf, and criminal conduct of impersonation and forgery by indulging in proxy voting," a Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee release said.

The complaint has been filed at Wokha Police Station on Tuesday.

Congress's demand for repolling, however, was not accepted for recommendation to the Election Commission by Returning Officer M Patton, who said, "No discrepancies were observed after going through the report of the presiding officer and sector magistrate."

Assam lashed by cyclonic storm, three injured



GUWAHATI, APR 17 (PTI): A severe cyclonic storm accompanied with heavy showers lashed several parts of Assam in the early hours of Wednesday leaving three persons injured and a trail of destruction.

The storm swept across central Assam districts of Golaghat, Nagaon and Morigaon as well as lower Assam districts of Kamrup (Metro), Kamrup, Nalbari, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and Dhubri from 2.45 am for several hours, officials said.

It damaged houses,

blew away the tin roofs of a large number of houses, uprooted trees and electric poles and snapped power lines including in Guwahati, they said adding many people were left homeless by the storm.

The high velocity storm and accompanying heavy rains, called Bordoisila in the state, also damaged pandals erected for the ongoing Rongali Bihu festival forcing dancers and singers to end their programmes.

The Bihu pandals at Latasil, Chandmari,

Noonmati, Maligaon areas here and at many other places of Assam were badly affected in the storm.

Three persons, including a woman, sustained serious injuries during the thunderstorm at Rangolumukh in Nagaon district, official sources said.

A tree fell on the Silghat-Nagaon section of North Eastern Frontier Railway near Salna disrupting train services, Railway sources said adding work is on for early restoration of the line

and movement of trains.

At Jagiroad in Morigaon district a huge tree fell on Kapili bridge halting traffic for several hours, the sources said.

The Met office here said a cyclonic circulation lies over east Assam and neighbourhood and extends upto 1.5 km above mean sea level.

It has forecast light to moderate rain or thundershowers at a few places in the next 24 hours and warned of thundersquall with maximum wind speed reaching upto 60 to 70 kmph at isolated places.



Klopp keeps Liverpool feet on ground before Porto return

PORTO (PORTUGAL), APR 17 (AFP): Liverpool are on the brink of a place in the Champions League semi-finals in what could turn out to be a dream season, but Jurgen Klopp warned his team still have a fight on their hands to finish the job in their quarter-final tie against FC Porto.

The Reds travelled to northern Portugal in a strong position going into Wednesday's second leg after a 2-0 win at Anfield last week, when Naby Keita and Roberto Firmino both scored.

Since then, the Premier League leaders have stretched their unbeaten run to 16 games and made it seven wins on the bounce by seeing off Chelsea 2-0 on Sunday.

Little wonder the excitement is building with Klopp's side still tantalisingly in with the chance of doing the double of Premier League and

Champions League, the kind of success not enjoyed at Anfield since the early 1980s.

However, there was no hint of complacency from the Liverpool manager as he spoke at the Estadio do Dragao on Tuesday. "It is so far a very positive season, that is why we are here, but we are not here to celebrate our situation," he said.

"We are here to go to the next round, because the season is not finished. We have to fight really hard.

"Porto won all their home games so far. The atmosphere in the stadium will be more Porto-dominated, that's clear -- they will try to have a kickstart in the game, so that is what I am thinking about and not about how good our season was until now."

Porto's impressive form at home in Europe



this season includes a win after extra time against Roma in the last round, but Klopp's side do have happy recent memories of visiting this ground -- Sadio Mane

scored a hat-trick in a 5-0 romp in the last 16 here a year ago.

- 'DISRESPECTFUL' -

"The result last year was maybe a bit of a false result," warned James

Milner, who expects a hostile welcome from the home crowd of nearly 50,000 on Wednesday.

"When we got Porto, some of the talk in the media I would have taken

it as pretty disrespectful if I were Porto.

"They've got a great European history and are used to winning trophies. There is going to be a special atmosphere

so it is important how we start the game and that we nullify that."

If they can, they will march on to the semi-finals as Klopp searches for his first trophy as Liverpool manager.

The flip side is that even harder tests are likely to come if they do progress, while they could conceivably win all their remaining Premier League matches and still miss out on the title to Manchester City.

- 'BEST IN THE WORLD' -

For now their form is such that Porto coach Sergio Conceicao was full of praise when he spoke earlier on Tuesday.

"They are everything I like about football. I like the way they play, the way they are with the ball and without it," Conceicao said.

"In my opinion, a lot of the time just now they are the best team in the world." Klopp -- who

has Jordan Henderson fit after an ankle problem and Joe Gomez in his squad but no Dejan Lovren -- said he took that comment as "a compliment, probably".

Porto have not made the semi-finals of this competition since they last won it in 2004 and, tellingly, Conceicao admitted the domestic league is his priority, with Porto currently level on points with leaders Benfica.

They remain hopeful, though, especially with captain Hector Herrera back from suspension along with veteran defender Pepe.

"Here at home normally we are a very strong team with our fans behind us. I really believe that tomorrow will be no exception and we will be able to go out with that positive energy and hurt Liverpool," said the Mexican Herrera.

Ponting surprised at Pant's exclusion, says he could have been India's X factor

BHARAT SHARMA

NEW DELHI, APR 17 (PTI): Australian great Ricky Ponting on Wednesday expressed surprise at Rishabh Pant's exclusion from India's World Cup squad, saying he could have been the X factor in the playing eleven.

Ponting met Pant on Monday night, hours after the India squad was announced with Dinesh Karthik being preferred over the 21-year-old for the reserve wicketkeeper's slot. "Yes I was surprised when he was left out of the Indian squad. I thought he would be in and he would be in the starting eleven. I thought someone like him batting at four or five could have been that X factor and the difference between India and the other teams," said the Delhi Capitals head coach.

Ponting had nothing but words of encouragement for the star Delhi Capitals player. "One thing we know about Indian cricket that there is a lot of depth around in batting and this time Rishabh has missed out. Knowing what he is like and the talent he has, I would be surprised if he doesn't play in at least three world cups before his career is over.

"I had a quick chat with him. He seems to have taken it pretty well. There is no doubt that he is disappointed, he would have loved to be in that squad but the thing he still has to remember is, potentially he will get the opportunity to play in three to four World Cups. "What is negative thing for the Indian team is positive for Delhi capitals. Really happy that the decision has been made and he can focus on the back half of the tournament."

Pant at times has been criticised for throwing away a good start. Asked if that could be the reason selectors did not pick Pant, Ponting said: "I don't know the selection criteria. Don't know why he is not being picked. I don't why the other guys have been picked ahead of him. To be honest it is none of my business.

"Though I don't think he is impatient, he is a

very smart player. I think he sums up situations and conditions really well. But they obviously have their reasons for not picking him and I am not going to comment on that.

"I actually think he missing out you will see a different player in the IPL. His determination will shine through and I am sure he will score heavily in the back half of the tournament," he said.

On the game against Mumbai Indians, Ponting said his team has adjusted to the wicket and the opposition will have a tough time on a slow and low Kotla pitch.

"It should not be difficult for us anymore. We have an understanding of how the wicket is going to play. It is going to be quite slow and slow and we expect it to turn a little bit. I feel it would be difficult for Mumbai to come play on this wicket. The last wicket caught us a bit off guard, we though it was going to play better."

Capitals are on course to make their first playoffs since 2012, having won five out of their eight games. Ponting however is not looking too far ahead.

"We are well placed but you can't take anything for granted in this tournament. You need at least eight wins to reach the playoffs. That's been our focus all along.

"I am happy with where the team's at. The last three games the boys of taken a lot of confidence. In the last game against SRH we didn't bat well but you could see the determination and focus they had with the ball and the fielding. It meant something to this group to win something on the road." Capitals have been playing better away from home but Ponting said it is equally important that the team starts doing well at the Kotla.

"We want to play some good cricket at home we haven't done that as yet. We Want to make sure we are a hard team to beat at home. We have four games to play at home, we want win them and we are in the play-off stage."

Playing XI not clicking, says Paddy Upton

MOHALI, APR 17 (PTI): Rajasthan Royals head coach Paddy Upton feels the inability to pick the right combination is the reason for his side's below-par performance this season.

Rajasthan Royals suffered their sixth loss of the season at the hands of Kings XI Punjab. They are currently placed at the penultimate spot on the points table with four points from eight games.

"We are not quite clicking as an eleven and that is costing us. You can't always have all eleven players in-form all the time. You want to give people a chance to settle into their roles to find their feet," Upton said after the 12-run loss to KXIP on Tuesday.

"We kept the team pretty consistent for a long time, but it wasn't quite clicking in some of the areas. We need to make some changes to search for that right combination. Every game we are falling just a little bit short either with one or two overs with the ball or with the bat."

Reflecting on the disappointing loss to KXIP, Upton said both Ravichandran Ashwin and



Murugan Ashwin did well to restrict the Rajasthan batsmen which swung the match in the Kings' favour.

"The two Ashwins (R Ashwin and M Ashwin) bowled really nicely. Although the batsmen did attack, they either did not find the gaps and we didn't find the boundaries, that's where advantage swung from our favour to Kings XI favour," he said.

"There were a few errors by the bowlers. We got into the wrong areas. We gave away five boundaries more than what we should have. They were little bit of

freebies rather than making the batsman really work for them."

The South African also heaped praise on pacer Jofra Archer for his consistent performance throughout the season.

"Jofra is a highly skilled bowler. The way he is able to structure the six balls he bowls, he just seems to know what to bowl at what time and his execution is awesome. He really is one player in our team who has delivered in every game, he has been exceptional," Upton said.

With the world cup looming several overseas players are expected to

join their national camps, leaving IPL mid way. For Rajasthan, key players including Englishmen Jos Buttler and Ben Stokes, Australian Steve Smith will be returning home early.

"We knew that we are going to be losing players. We have got nice replacements, we have got Oshane Thomas waiting in the wings should Jofra Archer go.

"When Buttler goes, we have got Liam Livingstone. We are quite comfortable that we are not going to be left with big gaping holes, certainly with the foreign internationals.

Iniesta's J-League club Kobe part ways with coach Lillo



TOKYO, APR 17 (AFP): Barcelona legend Andres Iniesta's Vissel Kobe have terminated the contract of manager Juan Manuel Lillo following a poor run of results, the Japanese club said on Wednesday.

The 53-year-old former Real Sociedad and Zaragoza boss won just two of six games since taking charge last October as star-studded Vissel slipped to 10th place in the 18-team J-League top flight.

Kobe officials said Lillo had left the club by mutual agreement.

Iniesta signed for Kobe last May in a historic J-League deal worth a reported 30 million a year. The World Cup winner, who lifted 32 major trophies with Barcelona, plays alongside former Germany striker Lukas Podolski and former Barca and Spain team mate David Villa.

Vissel were expected to mount a serious challenge for the J-League title with the 34-year-old's arrival but finished 10th last season, and fellow

Spaniard Lillo has failed to improve his talented side's results, despite the efforts of Iniesta.

Seven points off table-topping Hiroshima and FC Tokyo, Kobe have leaked nine goals in their last three matches.

Iniesta created two of the goals in Kobe's 4-2 home defeat by Hiroshima last weekend but was clearly in a foul mood when he walked off the pitch, barking "no comment" as he stormed past waiting reporters.

Iniesta's signing was viewed as a timely boost to the J-League, which once attracted luminaries such as Brazilian great Zico and former England striker Gary Lineker when it began in 1993 but has struggled to tempt marquee players in recent years.

But the 34-year-old has already hinted at a return to Barca in some capacity, recently telling Radio Marca: "I don't know what role I would occupy, but in any case Barcelona can count on me.

Excluded from main squad; Pant, Rayudu named India's standbys for World Cup

NEW DELHI, APR 17 (PTI): Young wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant and veteran batsman Ambati Rayudu were Wednesday named among the standbys for India's World Cup squad, reigniting their dashed hopes of making the trip to the UK in case an injury setback hits the side.

Speedster Navdeep Saini also found a place in the list of three backups for the mega-event starting on May 30.

Pant and Rayudu's exclusion from the squad of 15 had created quite a stir on Monday. While Sunil Gavaskar called Pant's omission surprising, the snub to Rayudu was questioned by Gautam Gambhir.

With the ICC doing



away with the practice of letting countries announce a probables' list before the final squad, the BCCI also has the option of including anyone apart from these three

but it is unlikely to happen. "Just like ICC Champions Trophy, we have three standbys. Rishabh Pant and Ambati Rayudu are the first and second standbys while Saini is

the bowler in the list. So if anyone gets injured, as per requirement, one of the three will be going," a senior BCCI official told PTI on Wednesday.

Rayudu took to Twit-

ter to take a dig at his omission from the squad of 15 on Tuesday.

"Just Ordered a new set of 3d glasses to watch the world cup," Rayudu wrote on his twitter handle Tuesday. This was after chairman of selectors MSK Prasad justified preferring Vijay Shankar over Rayudu, citing the former's "three-dimensional qualities".

While Khaleel Ahmed, Avesh Khan and Deepak Chahar will be travelling with the team purely as net bowlers, they can also be drafted in if the management feels so.

"Khaleel, Avesh and Deepak are not designated standbys. In case of bowlers, that possibility is there but when

it comes purely to batsmen, it will be either Rishabh or Rayudu," the official said. In other developments, there will be no Yo-Yo Test for the World Cup-bound players as the IPL is going to end only on May 12, just a few days before India head to the UK. India are scheduled to play their opening World Cup match on June 5 against South Africa in Southampton.

"The players are already in the middle of a gruelling T20 season. Once the IPL ends, they will need recovery time.

"It's not like that there is a gap between two series and you are having a test. If you are tired, the results may vary," the official explained.

Trump vetoes bill to end US support for Saudi-led Yemen war



WASHINGTON, APR 17 (AFP): President Donald Trump on Tuesday vetoed a resolution from Congress directing him to end US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen, the second such move of his presidency.

The resolution was a harsh bipartisan rebuke to Trump that took the historic step of curtailing a president's war-making powers -- a step he condemned in a statement announcing his veto.

"This resolution is an unnecessary, dangerous attempt to weaken my constitutional authorities, endangering the lives of American citizens and brave service members, both today and in the future," Trump said.

The veto was the second of his presidency, after he overrode a congressional resolution that aimed to reverse the border emergency he declared in order to secure more funding for his wall between the United States and Mexico in March.

Vetoing the measure is an "effective green light for the war strategy that has created the world's worst humanitarian

crisis to continue," said International Rescue Committee president and CEO David Miliband.

"Yemen is at a breaking point with 10 million people on the brink of famine. There are as many as 100 civilian casualties per week, and Yemenis are more likely to be killed at home than in any other structure." Trump argued that US support for the bloody war between the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and Iran-aligned Huthi rebels was necessary for a variety of reasons, "first and foremost" to "protect the safety of the more than 80,000 Americans who reside in certain coalition countries." These countries "have been subject to Huthi attacks from Yemen," he said, referring to drone and missile strikes the Saudi-led coalition has either claimed were intercepted or denied altogether.

The president also said the resolution would "harm the foreign policy of the United States" and "harm our bilateral relationships."

And it would "negatively affect our ongoing efforts to prevent civilian casualties and

prevent the spread of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and ISIS, and embolden Iran's malign activities in Yemen," Trump said, referring to two Sunni Muslim militant groups and his Shiite bete noire.

The resolution, which passed the US House of Representatives earlier this month and the Senate in March, was a historic milestone, as it was the first time in history that a measure invoking the 1973 War Powers Resolution reached the president's desk.

Democrats argued that US involvement in the Yemen conflict -- through intelligence-sharing, logistical support and now-discontinued aerial refueling -- is unconstitutional without congressional authority.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi -- the country's most senior Democratic politician -- took aim at Trump's veto in a series of tweets on Tuesday.

"The conflict in Yemen is a horrific humanitarian crisis that challenges the conscience of the entire world," Pelosi wrote. "Yet the President has cynically cho-

sen to contravene a bipartisan, bicameral vote of the Congress & perpetuate America's shameful involvement in this heart-breaking crisis." Senator Bernie Sanders, a lead author of the Yemen resolution and a Democratic 2020 presidential candidate, said that "the people of Yemen desperately need humanitarian help, not more bombs."

"I am disappointed, but not surprised, that Trump has rejected the bi-partisan resolution to end U.S. involvement in the horrific war in Yemen," Sanders tweeted.

Critics of the intervention warn that Saudi forces are likely using US weapons to commit atrocities in the four-year war.

Some 10,000 people have been killed in Yemen over the past four years, according to the World Health Organization, although rights groups say the toll could be five times higher.

Both the Saudi-led alliance and Huthi rebels have been accused of acts that could amount to war crimes, while the coalition has been blacklisted by the United Nations for killing and maiming children.

UNESCO experts ready to assist reconstruction of iconic Notre Dame

BY YOSHITA SINGH

UNITED NATIONS, APR 17 (PTI): Two-thirds of the largely medieval roof of the famed Notre Dame cathedral in Paris has gone after the devastating fire, but UN cultural experts are standing by to offer help in rebuilding the iconic structure, UNESCO World Heritage Centre Director Mechthild Rossler said.

Rossler, who visited the site Tuesday, told UN News that the cathedral is a universal symbol and the centre of France and its devastation has left people across nations shocked.

She described seeing people praying outside the stricken symbol of the city and the nation, still trying to take in the scale of the disaster.

I saw many, many people going from the Metro, to the site of Notre Dame, and I have to say many are still in a state of shock, because

it's not only the Christian community, it's a building for all of us, she said. Really, it's a universal symbol and it's the centre of France I think this is really shocking people profoundly and they lost something that is part of their identity.

Rossler said that a team of UNESCO experts is on hand to investigate the stability of the stonework and potential damage to stained glass windows, echoing a statement by the UNESCO Director-General, Audrey Azoulay, in which she announced that a rapid damage assessment would be carried out as soon as possible with the authorities.

After visiting the site of Notre Dame on Monday night, Azoulay said we are all heartbroken.

The Cathedral is part of the World Heritage site officially known as Paris, Banks of the Seine, inscribed on the

World Heritage List, in 1991. Notre Dame represents a historically, architecturally, and spiritually, outstanding universal heritage. It is also a monument of literary heritage, a place that is unique in our collective imagination, said the UNESCO chief, adding that the inferno which engulfed the cathedral, but appears to have left the medieval stonework intact, reminds us of the power of heritage that connects us to one another. We are receiving messages of support from all over the world.

The cathedral, where construction began in the 1160s extending for more than a century, is considered to be the finest example of the French Gothic style of architecture, with its groundbreaking use of rib vaults and buttresses, stained glass rosettes and sculpted ornaments.

UN finds torture, ill-treatment in Afghan prisons



KABUL, APR 17 (AP): A UN report says around a third of all conflict-related detainees in Afghanistan report being subjected to torture or ill-treatment.

UN officials interviewed a total of 618 detainees held in 77 facilities across the country between January 2017 and December 2018.

The alleged torture included suffocation, electric shocks, pulling of genitals and suspension from ceilings.

The UN mission to Afghanistan and the U.N. Human Rights Office released the joint report on Wednesday.

The US-backed Afghan government is holding thousands of

detainees, many of them captured as part of the ongoing war with the Taliban.

The Taliban have made major gains in recent years and now effectively control half the country. Widespread corruption and distrust of the government has undermined efforts to combat the insurgency.

'US seeks to extend detention of some asylum seekers'

WASHINGTON, APR 17 (AFP):

US President Donald Trump's administration has issued an order that could keep some asylum seekers in jail for months or years as they wait for their cases to be heard, The New York Times reported Tuesday.

The order from Attorney General Bill Barr directs immigration judges to no longer allow asylum seekers who are apprehended after entering the country illegally to post bail, the newspaper said.

The order -- which will not go into effect for 90 days -- does not affect those who apply for asylum at a legal port of entry, the Times reported.

The move was quickly condemned by the American Civil Liberties Union organization, which vowed to challenge it in court.

"Our Constitution does not allow the government to lock up asylum seekers without basic due process. We'll

see the administration in court. Again," the ACLU tweeted.

Trump has staked his presidency on his insistence that the United States is being overrun by migrants and asylum seekers.

But opponents, mostly in the Democratic Party, say his push for building more walls on the Mexican border and his almost daily denunciations of migrants as dangerous criminals incites racial hatred.

The president declared an emergency to bypass Congress and unlock funds for his controversial wall project, and has also deployed troops to the border with Mexico.

The White House has also said it is looking into ways to transfer undocumented migrants to so-called sanctuary cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York that limit cooperation with US immigration officials.

New Zealand disarms police as terror threat level lowered



WELLINGTON, APR 17 (AFP):

New Zealand police on Wednesday ended the routine arming of frontline officers as the terrorism threat level was lowered a month after the Christchurch mosques massacre.

Police and security agencies reduced the threat level from high to medium, meaning authorities judge that another attack, violent criminal behaviour, or violent protest remains "feasible" rather than "very likely".

The level is still higher than it was before the March 15 attacks, when the threat was deemed to be "low".

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said "there is no current specific threat", but the secu-

rity agencies believed the medium level "accurately reflects our current status".

Frontline New Zealand police have historically not carried firearms and many people were shocked to see them heavily armed after 50 Muslims were gunned down while at Friday prayers.

Police commissioner Mike Bush said with the easing of the security threat level, the police had reassessed their position on arming frontline staff and the carrying of weapons would now be decided on a case-by-case basis.

The decision was made after "significant consultation" with mosques and Islamic Centres in relation to on-

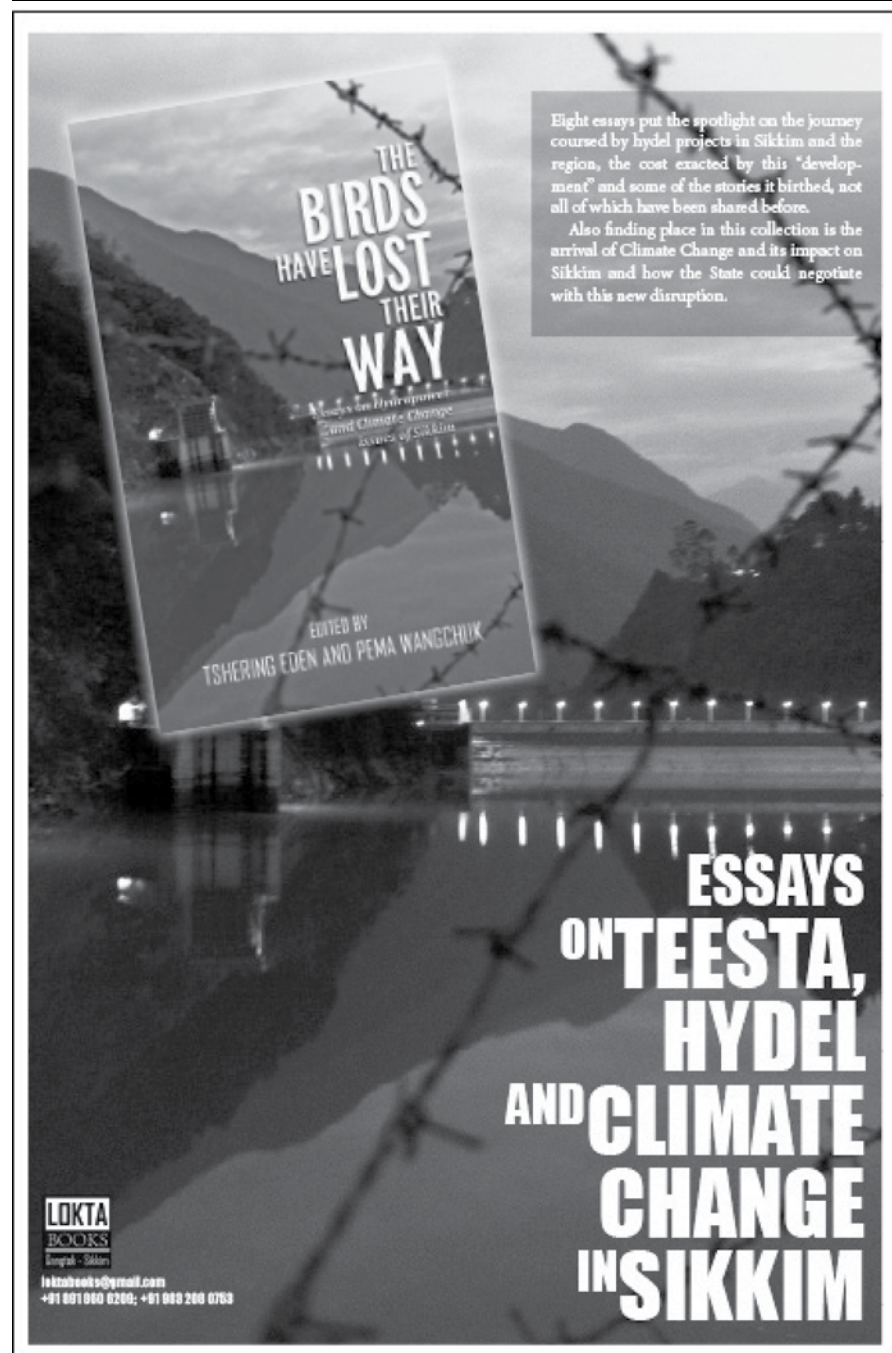
going security, although Bush said he would not release details.

"There was never any intention for the routine carriage of firearms to continue indefinitely," Bush said.

"Generally this means frontline staff will transition back to our normal approach regarding carriage and access to firearms. The police also released a timeline of the mosque attacks, showing it took 18 minutes from the time of the first emergency call to the apprehension of the alleged shooter.

A 28-year-old Australian, Brenton Tarrant, a self-avowed white supremacist, faces 50 murder charges and 39 of attempted murder over the attack.

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FEELIN' FLORAL! The actress, Sofia Vergara has spring fever wearing a coat covered in flowers in West Hollywood.

John Cusack to star in Amazon series 'Utopia'

LOS ANGELES, APR 17 (PTI): Actor John Cusack is all set to star in Amazon Studios thriller series "Utopia".

The project has been developed by author Gillian Flynn, best known for novels such as "Gone Girl" and "Sharp Objects". It recently received a nine-episode order from Amazon, according to The Hollywood Reporter.

The show, a remake of a British show, will follow a group of young adults who meet online and are mercilessly hunted by a shadowy deep state organization after they come into possession of a near mythical cult underground graphic novel.

They discover that the conspiracy theories in the comic's pages may actually be real and they are forced into the dangerous, unique and ironic position of saving the world, the plotline of the show read. Cusack, 52, will

portray the charismatic and media-savvy, Dr Kevin Christie, who has a brilliant bio-

TV series. He has previously made guest appearances in shows such as "Doll & Em"



tech mind and a philanthropic outlook. He altruistically wants to change the world through science.

This will be Cusack's first full-fledged role in a

and "Wall Street". The actor will be joined by Sasha Lane, Rainn Wilson, Ashleigh LaThrop, Desmin Borges, Farrah Mackenzie and Christopher Denham in the cast.

ARIES: Your razor-sharp mind gets a creative reboot today as communication planet Mercury beams into Aries until May 6. You may not be able to capture all the brainstorming that come flooding in during this once-a-year visit, but keep track of as many as possible and file them away for a later date.

TAURUS: Clear out your schedule today, Bull. As expressive Mercury flits into Aries, your introspective, imaginative twelfth house until May 6, you may get a wake-up call from your muse. Spending time in nature or quiet places will help you tap into your own source of creativity, but just keeping an open channel could pull in divinely inspired downloads.

GEMINI: Your popularity is on the rise! You've never been a shrinking violet, but now you can look forward to a few weeks of high-intensity socializing as your ruling planet, garrulous Mercury, zips into Aries and your eleventh house of group activity. Given your propensity for FOMO, your circuits could fry as you try to cram in one too many catch-ups.

CANCER: Calling all entrepreneurial Crabs! Today, messenger Mercury zips into Aries and your career corner until May 6, ping-pong your inner mogul. Because you could also catapult several rungs up the corporate ladder over the next few weeks, do some strategic socializing every chance you get. You're a magnet for success, so work your way into the inner circle of movers and shakers by becoming a regular at networking events.

LEO: The world's your oyster as quicksilver Mercury makes a global entry into your ninth house of travel and adventure until May 6, sparking your wanderlust. Grab your car keys—or passport—and enjoy a spur-of-the-moment getaway. If you can't get out of Dodge on such short notice, consider this your long-lead nudge to start planning your late-spring or summer vacay NOW.

LIBRA: Body language isn't just a dialect spoken by a few—it's the universal language of love! And today, your cosmic ruler, silver-tongued Mercury, flits into your sultry,

seductive erotic eighth house until May 6, inviting you to flirt with abandon. It's a time to let your desires be known, directly or with more secretive subtlety.

VIRGO: Hello, spring awakening. Messenger Mercury flips your love light on as it slinks into fiery Aries and your seventh house of relationships until May 6. No more flying solo; you're all about twosomes now, whether in love, business or creative ventures. Things getting serious? Don't rely on a handshake (or a kiss).

SCORPIO: Ready to spring into spring-cleaning? Today, detail-oriented Mercury ziplines into Aries until May 6, sparking the urge to tidy up, declutter, reorganize and REBOOT your routines and systems. Over the next few weeks, you'll be equal parts efficiency expert and DIY doyenne. You can bring artistry to your mission by letting your crafty side out to play. (Who says closet arranging isn't an art form? Surely not Marie Kondo!)

SAGITTARIUS: Pull off that oversized cashmere sweater and slip into something more glamorous—or better yet, sexier. To-

day, messenger Mercury wings into your amorous, glamorous fifth house until May 6, turning you into an unabashed flirtatious. Harboring a secret crush? It's time to act on it, Archer. Plan more playful dates over the next few weeks, whether you're single or spoken for. Think: private whisky tasting or an adventurous road trip to see Hamilton on tour. You'll be a magnet for magnates, so don't be shy about approaching the power players in any room!

CAPRICORN: Home base will be a buzzing hive of activity for the next few weeks as messenger Mercury dips into Aries and your domestic fourth house. Before you're off and running on a dozen projects, however, give yourself some well-earned downtime. Sit, rest, eat nourishing meals and catch up on your Netflix queue. Once you feel calm, cool and collected, THEN go ahead and organize your spring wardrobe, get the garden started or do something with that spare bedroom-cum-storage unit!

AQUARIUS: Flap your wings, o' social

butterfly! Outgoing Mercury flits into Aries and your third house of communication today, supercharging your inborn gift of gab until May 6. Don't wait for others to come up with fun activities: Grab the social director's mantle and lead the charge. Don't worry what the whiners want (or don't want) to do. What strikes YOUR fancy, Aquarius? Bowling nights, potluck dinners, indie rock shows? Mercury gives a special boost to all writing projects now, so get going on that memoir or those blog entries!

PISCES: Mind your money, Pisces, lest it get funny. Impulse buys are almost a competitive sport for your cash-flowy sign, but for the next few weeks, as analytical Mercury tours your second house of finances, you can tighten your belt AND get serious about a savings plan. Start by expunging all unnecessary splurges from your economic plan, and put the money you DIDN'T spend in a special savings account. Set a goal—enough to buy that one big-ticket "investment" piece, perhaps—and don't touch it until you reach your magic number.

One can't have a road map as an actor: Aditya Roy Kapoor

BY SHUBHA DUBEY

NEW DELHI, APR 16 (PTI): Acting as a profession may be associated with stardom, money, glamour and glitz, but Aditya Roy Kapoor says it is an "unsure" space to be in as it is impossible for an artiste to prepare a road map to success.

Aditya, 33, who started his journey as a VJ and went on to feature in supporting roles until his breakthrough in "Aashiqui 2", believes an actor is out of job once the film is wrapped.

"As an actor technically when you are off a film, you are out of a job. An actor goes from job to job. By virtue, acting is an unsure profession. You generally can't have a road map as an actor."

"It is impossible to decide where will you be in about five years. I don't know where I will be in five months from now. And I believe that is what keeps us on our toes and excited," the actor told PTI in an interview.

Getting opportunities to showcase one's acting talent, especially post failures, is hard, but Aditya says it is important to not put the actors in a spot as filmmaking is a team effort.

"If a film does not do well there is a certain period when you do feel low. It affects you because you put in a lot of effort. Everybody in the team puts a lot of energy. But again films are a collective process. It is not one person's victory or one person's failure. It is important to keep that in consideration," he adds.

The actor, whose last two solo outings -- "Fitoor" and "Ok Jaanu" -- did not

strike a right chord with the audience, says his love for the craft helps him in bouncing back.



"What keeps me going is the desire to do it again. Acting is something I love doing. Failure of a film doesn't diminish my love for acting. An opportunity to work with a new director, a new script keeps me excited."

"I believe one is not going to get any-

where by sitting and planning too much. The point is to keep doing and what will happen will happen," he adds.

Aditya is looking forward to the release Dharma Productions' pre-Independence set love story "Kalank". The actor says he accepted the role of Dev because he had never worked in a period drama.

"The setting of the film was very different from what I had done in the past. I was excited about it but also fearful as I was initially not sure about what I need to bring to the role in this kind of setting."

"Trying to imagine yourself as someone who is born in a completely different era was challenging. Dev, as a character, made me feel I was in an uncharted territory which is nice for an actor. I felt nicely unsure on this film," he says.

The actor is currently working on "Malang" directed by Mohit Suri and Anurag Basu's untitled anthology series, which features him opposite Sanya Malhotra.

"I never planned this spate of work. I just happened to be in a position where these films came to me. I am really excited about the work I am doing now. I am working with the directors I admire. So saying yes to these films was a no-brainer."

Aditya has also signed on to star in "Sadak 2" alongside "Kalank" co-stars Alia Bhatt, Sanjay Dutt and Pooja Bhatt.

"Kalank", directed by Abhishek Varman and also featuring Madhuri Dixit Nene, and Varun Dhawan, releases Wednesday.

Jennifer Lawrence returns to acting



LOS ANGELES, APR 17 (PTI): Jennifer Lawrence is back to acting a year after she took a work hiatus and has signed studio A24's new drama film.

The 28-year-old Oscar winner will play the lead in the film which will be directed by Lila Neugebauer from a screenplay by

Elizabeth Sanders, reported Variety.

The details of the project are being kept under wraps, but it looks like Lawrence is going back to her indie roots. The actor made a name for herself in the indie scene after she starred in 2010's "Winter's Bone". The new film will be

produced by Lawrence and Justine Polsky through their newly formed production company Excellent Cadaver. Scott Rudin and Eli Bush are also producing through their IAC Films division.

The shooting will start in mid-June in New Orleans.

Danny Boyle boards Alan McGee biopic 'Creation Stories'

LOS ANGELES, APR 17 (PTI): Danny Boyle is joining rock music biopic "Creation Stories," about music mogul Alan McGee, as an executive producer.

"The Kid" director Nick Moran is attached to helm, Variety reported.

The movie narrates the story of McGee and his record label, Creation Records, which launched bands such as Oasis, Primal Scream and The Jesus & Mary Chain.

The cast includes Rupert Everett, Suki Waterhouse and Jason Flemyng.

Irvine Welsh and Dean Cavanagh wrote the screenplay, based on McGee's autobiography, "The Creation Records Story: Riots, Raves and Running a Label".

Boyle directed 1996 film "Trainspotting", which was based on Welsh's 1993 novel of the same name.

Ewen Bremner, who starred as Spud in "Trainspotting", will take on the role of McGee in the new project.

The film, which starts shooting in late May in London, is being produced by casting director Dan Hubbard.

Angelina Jolie drops Brad Pitt's last name



Los Angeles, Apr 16 (PTI): Angelina Jolie has dropped 'Pitt' from her last name amid her divorce from estranged husband, actor Brad Pitt.

The news comes two days after it was reported that Jolie and Pitt, 55, are legally single.

According to court documents obtained by The Blast, the former couple filed a judgment on April 12 to move for a bifurcated judgement, which means they could end their marriage even as they continue to negotiate their divorce settlement.

Sources told the publication "it was very important for the stars to emotionally break away from each other and begin their new single lives, so the documents were fast-tracked with their private judge".

The former couple's six children are also listed on the document, but their names will continue to be hyphenated, Jolie-Pitt.